



ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

Introduction to American Government

Course Syllabus:
Spring 2013

POL 203
TTh 2:30-3:45
Morledge-Kimball 226

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Course Description:

At its core, this is essentially a course on the United States Constitution. To gain a greater understanding of this brief yet complex document, we will focus on two primary themes: first, we will look at the historical and ideological foundations of American system, which gave rise to the specific institutions of government that largely dictate the shape our laws. Second, and equally important, we will explore our political culture and traditions in order to better understand political behavior and the resultant public policy outcomes.

As we carefully consider the text of the Constitution and the arguments in favor and against it, we will constantly engage in a critical evaluation of the American system of government – past, present, and future. In other words, throughout this course you will be exposed to the historical nature, logic, and structure of the American system, and in the end you will be asked to directly question whether the system is working as intended and promised. Is it? How can we best characterize the American system of government? Has it remained a constitutional republic, or has it morphed into something more like a pluralist democracy or even an elite oligarchy? Do we live under a legal system which comports with the Founders’ vision? Are our laws still crafted in accordance with the theory of “the consent of the governed,” or has our contemporary political culture somehow led us astray from active and responsible citizenship?

Ultimately our goal is to reflect upon how well our Constitutional system is working. Perhaps the system works well for some groups and not for others. What factors contribute to whether an individual is able to claim his or her share of the American Dream? How important is our government’s role in securing our prosperity? Where is the line between the personal and the political, between the individual and the state? These are interesting questions, but ones that can be properly answered only after gaining a thorough understanding of the Constitution and the other founding documents that we will read over course of the semester.

Required Texts:

The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence.

The Federalist Papers (available online)

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution.*

Russell Dalton, *The Good Citizen.*

Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony.*

Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For.*

Supplemental readings will be handed out in class or can be obtained online.

Course Policies:

The first requirement of each student is to understand that this is an academic environment and as such it is necessary that there is a high degree of civility, respect for fellow students, and respect for the material. You are expected to do *all* assigned readings, and you must participate in class if you hope to earn a passing grade.

1. Missed Classes: This course covers a great deal of material and meets just twice a week; therefore repeated absences will not be tolerated. Students are allowed three absences, regardless of circumstance. Subsequent absences will result in your course grade being rescaled down by 1/3; i.e. a student with six absences will have their final grade reduced 1 point on a 4.0 scale.
2. Missed Assignments: If you do not turn in a graded assignment your maximum grade in the course will be rescaled along a 90/80/70/60 scale; i.e. if you fail to hand in a paper worth 20 percent of your grade, your highest possible grade in the class will be a B, regardless of your average on a 4-point scale.
3. Late Papers: Papers will lose one full letter grade per class session late. No exceptions.
4. Plagiarism and Cheating: Neither will be tolerated, and if a student is caught doing either they will fail the course and I will recommend to the Dean of Students that said student be expelled from school.
5. Electronic Devices: the use of any electronic device is strictly prohibited in this course. This includes e-readers, as I will not participate in the demise of the written word.
6. Email: I check my email daily but I prefer not to use it as a means of conversation. Email should be used only for quick, non-emergency questions and for setting up appointments for face-to-face meetings in my office. Also, for institutional as well as technological reasons, only communicate with me via your official @rocky.edu account.

Assessment Outcomes:

In this course, the following History & Political Science major assessment criteria are advanced:

1. Analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate major political issues and/or historical events;
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the major theories and thinkers in the field;
5. Assess, use, and synthesize different kinds of evidence from a variety of academic sources;
6. Understand the difference between opinions and substantiated scholarly claims;
7. Effectively utilize and appropriately cite academic sources;
8. Write papers essentially free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

OPI/PEPPS Standards and Learning Outcomes:

Standard 10.58.523, Social Studies

5(a): the nature of individual dignity, human rights, (popular) sovereignty, political power, citizenship, and political authority;

Learning Outcomes 2, 5, 6, 7, 8.

5(b) American democracy as a form of government based on federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, civil rights and liberties, elected representation, and popular participation;

Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 5, 7, 8.

5(c): the organization, powers, and politics of the national, state, tribal, and local units of American government;

Learning Outcomes 2, 5, 7, 8.

5(d): the role of public opinion, the press, elections, interest groups, and political leaders in building compromise and policy making;

Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 5.

Graded Assignments:

Exam:

There will be one midterm exam, which will consist of several short-answer questions and will essentially be equal to a comprehensive final exam on our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Because of the scope of this exam, students should take extensive notes throughout the semester.

It is my philosophy that exams should be completely predictable in the sense that students will know exactly what is expected of them before they walk in the room, giving students the opportunity to showcase what they *do* know, rather than to try to get at what they *don't*. You will encounter no trick questions.

Final Paper:

In lieu of a final exam, you will be required to write an 8-10 page essay in which you answer the question as to whether the American system of governance is working as intended. To do so you must compare, contrast, and in general critically evaluate the discussions presented throughout the course, with an analytical focus of the foundations of American democracy. One may see the American experiment in self-government as an unmitigated success while the others may find quite the opposite; there is no right or wrong answer – but part of being a responsible citizen is asking and answering this essential question. This paper should be a comprehensive review essay with the overarching theme of “The Constitution: Then and Now,” and it should unify all the materials we have covered in the semester. Final papers will not require any outside research – in fact, no outside research will be allowed.

Note: these papers must be composed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with normal one-inch margins. Papers will lose 1/3 of a grade if they exceed the stated limits, are not paginated properly, or are not stapled. Late papers will lose one full grade per day.

Reading Quizzes:

There will be numerous quizzes given throughout the semester, the exact number will depend on rates of participation in course discussions and whether students come to class prepared. Reading quizzes are rudimentary examinations used to determine who is and who is not doing assigned readings; a student who fails a quiz will be counted absent for that class session, thus diminishing their overall grade as delineated in Course Policy 1.

Grading:

All papers and exams will be graded on an A-F scale and will be averaged as follows:

Midterm Exam:	50 percent
Final Paper:	30 percent
Participation:	20 percent

Grading Criteria:

These are the standards I adhere to when I grade essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). Grades are based on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent.

A

Excellent in every way (this is not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen evidence revealingly. The analysis enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply repeat what has been taught). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay. Its introduction opens up, rather than flatly announces, its thesis. Its conclusion is something more than a summary. The language is clean, precise, often elegant. The reader should feel enlightened and educated for having read the paper. There's something new in your analysis, something perhaps only you could have written and explored, in this particular way. The writer's stake in the material is obvious.

B

A piece of writing that reaches high and achieves many of its aims. The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not. The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me. This is a solid essay whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be rather routine (the limitation is largely conceptual).

C

A piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas: conception (there's at least one main idea but it is fuzzy and difficult to understand); structure (non-linear development of your ideas); use of textual evidence (weak or non-existent -- the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or are simple platitudes and generalizations); language (the sentences are often awkward, dependent on unexplained abstractions, sometimes contradict each other). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth and without a developmental flow. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.

- or- an essay that is largely plot summary or "interpretive summary" of the text, but is written without major problems.
- or- an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something. Well-written, but scant intellectual content
- mostly opinion.

D and F

These are efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas.

- or- those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.;
- or- those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.

Participation:

The majority of class time will be devoted to discussion of the assigned readings. Discussion can include (but is not limited to) an analysis and/or critique of the author's position, a comparison of the assigned work to another text, or debate as to the meaning or merit of a given work (or particular points therein).

Class participation is evaluated on quality rather than quantity. Comments need not mirror the position of the author (or the professor). You are graded not on the "correctness" of your position, but rather on your analysis of the material and your ability to articulate your ideas. You don't have to be at the center of every debate, but students who make little or no effort to enter discussions will receive a lower participation grade. Discussion will become lively, heated even. Always respect the positions of others. When you disagree with someone, be sure to criticize the *idea* and not the person.

Participation will be graded according to the following criteria:

A

The student in this grade range arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with comments and questions on the assigned reading. Comments reveal that the student has read carefully; this student occasionally initiates the discussion without waiting for the professor to do so. This student does not, however, try to dominate the class, but listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as to the instructor's questions.

B

The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. There is evidence of having done the reading. This student pays attention to the comments of the other students.

C

The student in this grade range participates only intermittently, and is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. Sometimes unprepared, this student lacks interest in the ideas of other members of the class, neglects to bring the proper text to class, and is often inattentive.

D or F

The student in this grade range seldom if ever participates.

Things that lower your participation grade:

- * Not paying attention in class
- * A ringing cellphone
- * Talking to your neighbor or holding conversations separate from the class discussion
- * A student who is seen using their phone for any reason will receive an F as their final grade in the course

NOTE: Unlike paper grades, participation will *not* be given plus/minus or split grades, and your final grade is weighted in a manner such as to make it impossible for you to receive an A for the course if your participation grade is not an A.

Semester Schedule:

Week 1:

1/8

Introduction and course outline
Political Knowledge Quiz

1/10

Political Knowledge Quiz results
Roundtable discussion on the State of the Union
The Declaration of Independence, Preamble
The Constitution, Preamble
Federalist 10

Week 2:

1/15

The Constitution, Article I
Federalist 52, 62
Terms to look up:
Congressional committees & Conference committee
Enumerated powers
Elastic clause
Presentment clause
Commerce clause
Filibuster/Cloture

1/17

The Constitution, Article II
Federalist 73
Terms to look up:
Line-item veto
Signing statements
Executive orders
War powers act

Week 3:

1/22

The Constitution, Article III

Federalist 78

Terms to look up:

Writ of Certiorari

Judicial review

Judicial restraint

Judicial activism

Original intent

Original meaning

1/24

The Constitution, Articles IV-VII

Federalist 39, 46

Terms to look up:

Supremacy clause

Privileges and immunities clause

Full faith and credit clause

Week 4:

1/29

The Constitution, Amendments I-X

Federalist 84

Terms to look up:

Establishment clause

Eminent domain

Miller test

Exclusionary rule

Prior restraint

Miranda warning

1/31

The Constitution, Amendments XIII-XV

Terms to look up:

Jim Crow laws

Separate but equal

Equal protection clause

Incorporation doctrine

Strict scrutiny

Week 5:

2/5

Review for exam and mop-up

2/7

MIDTERM EXAM

Week 6:

2/12

Storing, Chapter 2

2/14

Storing, Chapter 3

Week 7:

2/19

Storing, Chapters 4 & 6

2/21

Storing, Chapter 8

Week 8:

2/23

Dahl, Chapters 1 & 2

2/25

Dahl, Chapter 6

3/4-3-8

Midterm Break

Week 9:

3/12

Dahl, Chapter 7

3/14

Dahl, Chapter 8

Week 10:

3/19

Dalton, Chapter 4

3/21

Dalton, Chapter 7

Week 11:

3/26

Dalton, Chapter 9

3/28

Huntington, Chapter 1

Week 12:

4/2

Huntington, Chapter 2

4/4

Huntington, Chapter 3 (31-41)

Week 13:

4/9

Huntington, Chapter 4 (61-75)

4/11

Huntington, Chapter 4 (75-84)

Week 14:

4/16

Huntington, Chapter 5 (85-104)

4/18

Huntington, Chapter 5 (105-129)

Week 15:

4/23

Huntington, Chapter 6 (138-149; 154-166)

4/25

Huntington, Chapter 8 (221-245; 259-262)
The Constitution, “Then and Now” discussion

4/30

FINAL PAPERS DUE